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ABSTRACT

The 1998 Hawaii Opinion Poll on Public Education is the fifth to report the public's perceptions of public schools. Three questions included in every report since 1990 ask respondents to grade Hawaii's public schools, whether schools are improving or deteriorating, and to identify the school system's biggest problems. Responses of two subgroups, those with children in public schools and those without school-age children, were compared to those of the overall sample population in this study and to the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup national poll of attitudes about public schools. As in past years, respondents in both polls viewed schools attended by their children most favorably, national respondents viewed their local schools more favorably than the nation's schools as a whole, and Hawaiian respondents viewed the nation's school more favorably than their own, in sharp contrast to national-level data. A substantial plurality (43%) believes school quality is about the same as five years ago. Compared to five years ago, non-parents think schools are improving while parents with children in public schools believe quality is declining. The two groups now have roughly similar views regarding overall quality. The biggest problems identified by Hawaiians are funding, overcrowding, poor curriculum, poor class management, and a lack of supplies. (Includes appendices detailing study methodology, results, and sampling error.) (TEJ)

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Office of Accountability and School Instructional Support
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Department of Education
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Hawaii Opinion Poll on Public Education

Introduction

The 1998 Hawaii Opinion Poll on Public Education (HOPPE) is the fifth in a series of reports on the public's perceptions of education in Hawaii's public schools. Adult residents of the State were asked by trained staff of Mattson Sunderland Research and Planning Associates, Inc. for their opinions on Hawaii's public schools. The questions they were asked included three questions that have been included in HOPPE since its inception in 1990:

1. What grade would you give to Hawaii's public schools?
2. Have Hawaii's public schools been improving or getting worse?
3. What are the biggest problems facing Hawaii's public schools?

The respondents to the 1998 poll were 500 adult (18 years of age or older) Hawaii residents who were randomly selected from the four Hawaii counties, Honolulu, Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai, in proportion to their populations. This sample of residents is ethnically diverse and representative of a wide range of economic circumstances. The details of the sample's demographic characteristics are tabled in Appendix A, *HOPPE Methodology*.

The responses of two specific subgroups of respondents were examined in addition to those of the overall sample, respondents with children in the public schools and those with no school aged children. These comparisons show whether persons having direct experience with schools (i.e., parents of school children) hold different views than the public at large. There were too few people in the sample who have children in private schools to constitute a representative sample of private school parents.

Results from the 1998 poll were compared with those of earlier polls, 1996 and 1994, to determine whether the public's views have changed over the course of the past four years. They were also compared with the most current Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup national poll on public attitudes toward the nation's public schools. The national poll was conducted in June 1997 and published in September 1997.

The results of the 1998 HOPPE are tabled in Appendix B, *Survey Results*. Opinion polls require careful interpretation; the error associated with sampling must be considered when interpreting results, especially differences in responses between groups. The 1998 HOPPE has an overall margin of error of about five percent. The sampling error to specific questions, however, depends on the number of persons responding (whether the overall group or one of the subgroups) and the percentage of the group giving a particular response. In this report, differences between group responses will be noted only when the differences exceed sampling error. See Appendix C, *Sampling Error*, for guidelines on the use of sampling error in interpreting results.

Grading the Schools

The public was asked to evaluate the public schools in Hawaii and in the nation, and parents of public school children were also asked to evaluate their children's schools by assigning a letter grade (A – F). As in the past, all respondents gave higher grades (29% A or B) to the nation's public schools than to Hawaii's public schools (16.6% A or B). The grades assigned to Hawaii's public schools are virtually unchanged from 1996 (16.6% A or B compared to 16.7% in 1996).

The parents of public school children in Hawaii graded the nation's public schools about the same (31% A or B) as the public at large but graded Hawaii's public schools almost as highly (26% A or B), a notably different view from that of the public at large. These same parents of public school children graded their oldest child's school much more favorably (54% A or B) than they did either the nation's public schools or Hawaii's public schools. This appears to be slightly, but not significantly better than the 1996 HOPPE, on which public school parents gave their oldest child's school 50% A or B grades.

There is also a difference between Hawaii respondents to HOPPE and the national sample of respondents to the 1997 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll in the relative grading of the nation's public schools, local public schools, and their own child's school. Respondents to both polls viewed the school attended by their own child most favorably, but national respondents viewed their local schools more favorably than the nation's public schools, while Hawaii respondents viewed the nation's public schools more favorably than Hawaii's public schools.

Have Schools Improved?

We asked the public two questions concerning improvement in the public schools of Hawaii:

1. In the past five years, do you think public schools in Hawaii have improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?
2. As you look back on your own elementary and high school education, is it your impression that children today get a better education, about the same, or a worse education than you did?

The responses to the first question showed slight but not significant improvement over those that were given two years ago. About two percent more of the respondents this year indicated that public schools had gotten better over the last five years, and about four percent fewer than in 1996 said that public schools had gotten worse. Overall, a substantial plurality (43%) of the sample judged that the public schools were about the same as they were five years ago, with about 5% more saying they are worse than

saying that they are better. Two years ago, the difference between those seeing improvement and those seeing decline was about 11%.

While a plurality of Hawaii residents sees the public schools as unchanged in quality over the last few years, only a small minority of those same respondents (19%) believe that children today receive an education about equal to what they received. Roughly equal proportions of respondents feel that today's children either get a better (40%) or a worse (38%) education than they did. These proportions are quite similar, but reversed in order, from those of two years ago. Compared to 1996, the percentage of non-parents who think that children today get a better education than they did has increased. The percentage of parents of school children who feel that way has declined. While in 1996 parents of school children had a much more favorable view of children's educational opportunities than non-parents did, now the two groups have very similar views.

Public Schools' Biggest Problems

In the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup national poll on public education, three of the four issues mentioned by more than 10 percent of the sample as constituting the schools' "biggest problems" are matters involving student discipline: lack of discipline or control (ranked 1st); use of drugs or dope (ranked 3rd); and fighting, violence, or gangs (ranked 4th). The fourth issue (ranked 2nd) was lack of financial support for schools. By contrast, in our sample of Hawaii residents five issues were cited by over 10 percent of respondents as schools' "biggest problem." These were, in order of citation by our sample: (1) lack of financial support (27%); (2) large classes or overcrowding (19%); (3) poor curriculum or low standards (14%); (4) lack of discipline or poor class management (12%); and (5) lack of supplies, materials, or equipment (12%). More than twice as many respondents (69%) mentioned money issues among the schools' most serious problems as mentioned discipline issues (30%).

Conclusions

The 1998 HOPPE is the fifth in a continuing series of polls, begun in 1990, to assess the public's opinions toward the public schools. In this poll we can see both continuity with past results and evidence of changing perceptions of the quality and problems of public schools in Hawaii. We also see continuing evidence of both similarities and differences between perceptions of public schools in Hawaii and in the nation at large.

1. Hawaii's public rates the nation's public schools higher than they do their own, in contrast with results from national polls.
2. Parents of public school children in Hawaii rate Hawaii's public schools higher than does the public at large.

3. Parents of public school children, both in Hawaii and nationally, rate their children's schools much more favorably than they do either the nation's schools or the schools of their local school system (in Hawaii, the state school system).
4. A substantial plurality of the public believes that schools have neither improved nor gotten worse in the last five years. In this poll, fewer people feel that they have gotten worse than did in 1994 or 1996.
5. Only about one-fifth of respondents think that today's students get an education about equal to their own. The remainder of the respondents are almost evenly divided between feeling that today's children get a better education than they did and feeling that today's children receive a poorer education, with a slightly but not significantly higher percentage believing that today's children receive a better education.
6. Hawaii's citizens differ markedly with those elsewhere on the major problems facing public schools. While citizens nationally consider discipline issues the major problem, in Hawaii the major perceived problem is financial support and related issues, such as overcrowding.

Appendix A: HOPPE Methodology

Characteristics of the 1998 HOPPE Sample

The sample of persons interviewed for the 1998 HOPPE consisted of 500 adults (aged 18 or older) living in households throughout the state. The number of households interviewed in each county was in proportion to its share of the statewide population as reported in the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism's *The State of Hawaii Data Book*, 1992. The distribution of households by county is shown below.

Sample Allocation for the 1998 HOPPE Survey

County	Residential Housing Units	Percent	Number of Interviews
Honolulu	265,304	74%	370
Hawaii	41,461	12%	60
Maui	33,207	9%	45
Kauai	16,295	5%	25
Total	356,267	100%	500

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire used for the HOPPE survey was identical to that used in 1996. It was developed by the Department of Education and reviewed by Mattson Sunderland Research staff. The questionnaire included repeat questions from the 1994 survey, some of which were items identical to those used by the Gallup Organization in its national poll, and standard demographic queries about age, ethnicity, income, education, and sex. Since all 1998 HOPPE questions had been pretested and used in three previous surveys (1991, 1994, and 1996) there was no pretest necessary for the survey.

Interviewing

All interviewing was conducted from Mattson Sunderland Research's calling center using a networked computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. A field supervisor was on duty during the time calls were being made.

The statewide survey began on February 13, 1998, and was completed on February 20. All interviews were conducted between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. on weekdays, between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Saturdays, and between 1 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Sundays. Up to five attempts were made to reach each household in the sample before a replacement was used. Follow-up calls were automatically scheduled for each interviewer by the CATI system and were made at different times of the day than previous attempts.

Appendix A

The survey employed a screening procedure to interview Hawaii residents who had declared themselves to be either the head of the household or the spouse of the head. In the small number of instances where neither was available, another family member 18 years of age or older was interviewed.

Mattson Sunderland Research's interviewers for this project were experienced in the administration of public opinion surveys in Hawaii and in the use of the CATI workstations and system. They were skilled in the techniques of telephone surveying and eliciting the information required. Interviewers received special training in the use of the HOPPE questionnaire and in the procedures for this study.

Survey Response Rates

A common measure by which population surveys are judged is the proportion of the original sample that was actually interviewed. The higher the rate of completion, the less likely it is that important groups of people are under-represented in the survey because they were harder to reach, and the more likely it is that the sample adequately represents the population as a whole.

In this study, interviews were successfully completed with slightly less than half of the households that we attempted to contact. The following table shows the disposition of survey attempts.

Results of Attempts to Contact Sample Households

	Number	Percent
Interview completed	500	45%
No answer or no adult home after five contact attempts	248	22%
Refused the interview	305	27%
Speaks foreign language only	58	6%
Total	1,111	100%

Appendix A

Data Processing

The software used by Mattson Sunderland to record interview responses ensured that all responses were coded in the proper range of response codes.. Survey responses were transmitted directly from interviewers's workstations to a network data file, eliminating the possibility of errors in transmitting responses from paper questionnaires. The responses to open-ended question were categorized and coded by DOE Evaluation Section staff.

Survey Questions

After first determining that the respondent was an adult resident of Hawaii, interviewers asked each eligible respondent the following questions:

1. First of all, we would like your opinions on what you think are the biggest problems facing the public schools in Hawaii. What else do you think are problems?
2. In the past five years do you think the public schools in Hawaii have improved, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?
3. As you look back on your own elementary and high school education, it is your impression that children today get a better education, about the same, or a worse education than you did?
4. Using the grading scale of A, B, C, D, or FAIL, what grade would you give Hawaii public schools as a whole.. A, B, C, D, or FAIL?
5. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally.. A, B, C, D, or FAIL?
6. Do you have any children who are now in kindergarten to grade 12?
 - a. IF YES Do your children attend public school or private school?
 - b. IF BOTH Is your oldest child in public or private school?
 - c. Is your oldest child in elementary school, intermediate, or high school?
7. Using the grade scale of A, B, C, D, or FAIL, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends? [Asked only of respondents with children in school.]

Appendix B: Responses to Survey Questions

Table 1. What are the biggest problems facing public schools in Hawaii?

Problem	All Respondents		Respondents with No School Children		Public School Parents	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of financial support, proper allocation	136	27.2%	84	25.1%	40	31.5%
Large classes, overcrowding	95	19.0%	49	14.7%	37	29.1%
Poor curriculum or low standards	69	13.8%	47	14.1%	16	12.6%
Lack of discipline or poor class management	62	12.4%	44	13.2%	11	8.7%
Lack of supplies, materials, or equipment	59	11.8%	36	10.8%	19	15.0%
Parental lack of interest, participation, or cooperation	47	9.4%	33	9.9%	10	7.9%
Politics, bureaucracy, or unions	45	9.0%	30	9.0%	13	10.2%
Low teacher salaries	38	7.6%	24	7.2%	9	7.1%
No comment; I don't know	38	7.6%	27	8.1%	8	6.3%
Use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco	35	7.0%	21	6.3%	12	9.4%
Poor teaching of "basics"	30	6.0%	21	6.3%	4	3.1%
Teacher recruitment and retention	26	5.2%	22	6.6%	3	2.4%
Students' lack of interest or motivation, truancy	23	4.6%	19	5.7%	3	2.4%
Poor teacher education; low standards for teachers	23	4.6%	12	3.6%	7	5.5%
Miscellaneous	18	3.6%	10	3.0%	5	3.9%
Youth gangs	18	3.6%	12	3.6%	4	3.1%
Poorly kept, run-down, or inadequate facilities	17	3.4%	12	3.6%	5	3.9%
Teacher apathy or lack of caring or commitment	14	2.8%	10	3.0%	4	3.1%
Ethics, morals, or values	13	2.6%	11	3.3%	2	1.6%
No problems	13	2.6%	9	2.7%	4	3.1%
Poor teaching or teachers	13	2.6%	7	2.1%	3	2.4%
Crime, vandalism, or violence	12	2.4%	8	2.4%	2	1.6%
School day or school year too short	10	2.0%	7	2.1%	3	2.4%
English language difficulties, use of pidgin	10	2.0%	10	3.0%	0	0.0%
Ethnic conflicts, racism, or prejudice	6	1.2%	4	1.2%	2	1.6%
Peer pressure	5	1.0%	5	1.5%	0	0.0%
Other responses	11	2.2%	10	3.0%	1	0.8%
Number of respondents	500		334		127	

Appendix B

Table 2. Have Hawaii's Public Schools Improved in the Last 5 Years?

Quality	All Respondents		Respondents with No School Children		Public School Parents	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Better	101	20.2%	66	19.8%	30	23.6%
Worse	125	25.0%	83	24.9%	30	23.6%
Same	216	43.2%	141	42.2%	58	45.7%
Don't know	58	11.6%	44	13.2%	9	7.1%
N	500		334		127	

Table 3. Do Children Today Get a Better or Worse Education than You Did?

Quality	All Respondents		Respondents with No School Children		Public School Parents	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Better	201	40.2%	135	40.4%	53	41.7%
Same	96	19.2%	65	19.5%	20	15.7%
Worse	189	37.8%	124	37.1%	50	39.4%
Don't know	14	2.8%	10	3.0%	4	3.1%
N	500		334		127	

Table 4. Grading Hawaii's Public Schools

Grade	All Respondents		Respondents with No School Children		Public School Parents	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A & B	83	16.6%	48	14.4%	33	26.0%
A	8	1.6%	6	1.8%	2	1.6%
B	75	15.0%	42	12.6%	31	24.4%
C	262	52.4%	182	54.5%	61	48.0%
D	110	22.0%	68	20.4%	26	20.5%
F	26	5.2%	22	6.6%	3	2.4%
Don't know	19	3.8%	14	4.2%	4	3.1%
N	500		334		127	

Appendix B

Table 5. Grading The Nation's Schools

Grade	All Respondents		Respondents with No School Children		Public School Parents	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A & B	145	29.0%	95	28.4%	39	30.7%
A	10	2.0%	7	2.1%	2	1.6%
B	135	27.0%	88	26.3%	37	29.1%
C	194	38.8%	129	38.6%	47	37.0%
D	29	5.8%	17	5.1%	10	7.9%
F	11	2.2%	9	2.7%	1	0.8%
Don't know	121	24.2%	84	25.1%	30	23.6%
N	500		334		127	

Table 6. Grading Their Oldest Child's School

Public School Parents			Private School Parents		
Grade	Number	Percent	Grade	Number	Percent
A & B	64	54.2%	A & B	44	91.7%
A	21	17.8%	A	23	47.9%
B	43	36.4%	B	21	43.8%
C	38	32.2%	C	3	6.3%
D	10	8.5%	D	1	2.1%
F	3	2.5%	F	0	0.0%
Don't know	3	2.5%	Don't know	0	0.0%
N	118		N	48	

Table 7. Public School Parents

Elementary School Parents			Secondary School Parents		
Grade	Number	Percent	Grade	Number	Percent
A & B	36	64.3%	A & B	28	45.2%
A	10	17.9%	A	11	17.7%
B	26	46.4%	B	17	27.4%
C	18	32.1%	C	20	32.3%
D	1	1.8%	D	9	14.5%
F	0	0.0%	F	3	4.8%
Don't know	1	1.8%	Don't know	2	3.2%
N	56		N	62	

Appendix C: Sampling Error

Sampling Error for a Single Group

When interpreting survey results, sampling error must be considered. Sampling error is the degree of uncertainty inherent in estimating a population's characteristics from a sample taken from the population. The size of the sampling error depends primarily on the number of individuals in the sample. The following table shows how much allowance must be made for sampling error at different combinations of percentage and sample size.

**Sampling Error of a Percentage
(95% Confidence)**

Percentages	Sample Size			
	Near	600	400	200
10%	3%	4%	5%	8%
20%	4%	5%	7%	10%
30%	5%	6%	8%	12%
40%	5%	6%	9%	12%
50%	5%	6%	9%	13%
60%	5%	9%	9%	12%
70%	5%	6%	8%	12%
80%	4%	5%	7%	10%
90%	3%	4%	5%	8%

For example, suppose that 52% of all survey respondents had rated public schools with a grade of "C" and there were 400 respondents in the survey. There would be an error associated with the sample percentage of plus or minus 6%. The 6% error comes from the column for a sample size of 400 and the row for a percentage near 50%. The probability associated with these errors is 95%; that is, the probability is 95% that the actual percentage in the population who rated the public schools with a grade of "C" would fall between 46% and 58%.

Differences Between Groups in a Sample

When comparing percentages between sample groups (e.g., parents vs. non-parents) the difference between groups is subject to a sampling error similar to that for estimating percentages for a population group. More specifically, for given sample sizes, there is a threshold difference in the percentages of the two groups that must be reached before one is reasonably certain (95%) that there is **any** difference between the groups in the population. These threshold values depend upon both the sample sizes and the percentage values for

Appendix C

the groups. The tables below present these threshold percentage differences for samples of size 200, 400, and 600 and for percentages near 50% and near 20% or 80%. Threshold differences for other sample sizes or percentages can be determined by interpolation.

**Sampling Error for Percentage Difference between Groups
(95% Confidence Level)**

Percentages near 20% or 80%

Sample Size	Sample Size		
	600	400	200
600	6%		
400	7%	7%	
200	8%	9%	10%

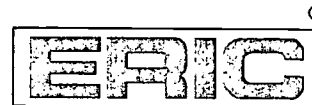
Percentages near 50%

Sample Size	Sample Size		
	600	400	200
600	7%		
400	8%	9%	
200	10%	10%	11%

To determine whether or not a difference between sample groups indicates a real difference between population groups, compare the difference between sample percentages with the tabled values for the sample sizes involved and value of the percentage in the sample groups. For example, if 42% of the 334 parents sampled and 40% of the 127 non-parents say that children today get a better education than they did, these values are not evidence of a real difference between all parents and all non-parents on this issue. The difference would have to be over 10% to indicate a real difference between these groups in the population (sample sizes of <400 and <200 and percentages near 50%).



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